

## **Airbnb and the shared economy in Sweden: Building resilience or illusions?**

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Over the last 8 years or so the so-called shared economy has made major inroads into the tourism industry throughout the world. Daily, we are greeted with news about Uber's battles with local authorities and traditional taxi companies while Airbnb has proceeded in rapidly transforming the tourism accommodation scene in countless destinations. Advocates of this new way of traveling and consuming tourism services praise it for bringing ever-more demanding visitors closer to their guests in an affordable manner. In the case of Airbnb, for instance, one can often spend a few days in a "normal neighborhood" that lies beyond the so-called highly regulated tourism bubble and, thus, really get to know the locality. Meantime, some observers argue that this innovation in the travel sector allows bottom-up growth and control while giving local residents greater opportunities to diversify their household income. This transition has not been smooth, however. Questions arise about the legality of such businesses within the context of the local legal and tax frameworks while the industry (e.g., Airbnb) washes its hands of any direct responsibility by stating that the local providers are responsible for following local rules and regulations. There are increasing concerns in some cities that entire blocks are transformed into Airbnb ghettos often controlled and operated by corporations rather than individuals. Indeed, one pressing concern is that because of Airbnb the property market is becoming increasingly less affordable in some parts of cities given that many properties are bought and renovated specifically for the tourism accommodation sector. Meanwhile, long-term residents of neighborhoods where Airbnb has begun to take over are becoming increasingly uncomfortable about the disruptions caused by the comings and goings of strangers in their midst. Several questions arise that scholars have only just begun exploring. These concern both the users of Airbnb as well as the suppliers of such services. From the demand side, for example, it is necessary to comprehend what consumers base their decisions on in choosing among countless properties. From the supply side, it is interesting to examine how participating properties are selected and dropped by Airbnb as well as investigating the benefits but also the costs of such activities in local communities. In this paper I shall be investigating the Airbnb sector in Sweden and see what it means in terms of neighborhood gentrification and disruption. A major

question to be investigated is: Do activities such as Airbnb reflect the opportunity for bottom-up resilience in the tourism industry or is what we encountering another form of uneven power relationship between a growing multinational concern and a wide array of local suppliers? Importantly, what does this phenomenon mean from the equity/social justice point of view?